

Defining Grace

What is Grace?

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Given 09-Jan-93; Sermon #055

If you would turn to Matthew 5, we will continue on the subject of grace and we will take a look at the way God normally acts.

Matthew 5:44-45 But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully [or spitefully] use you, and persecute you; that [this is the purpose of this] you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

God is normally kind, merciful, and patient to everybody. That is the way He acts. That is His *modus operandi*. He is a Being who is full of patience, full of mercy, full of grace.

You might recall the illustration that I gave toward the end of the sermon last week regarding the students who came to expect the professor's forgiveness of the students' late papers. The students came to expect mercy from the professor. When the professor decided to no longer extend the deadline, how did the students react? They reacted with outrage!

I do not know if you applied that to yourself, but that is a very normal human reaction—to react towards God's justice when it is executed in a way that is, let us say, pointing the finger of accusation against God.

It is the same way we might react when we read of something like He did with Nadab and Abihu. Why are we shocked? We are shocked because He rarely acts the way He did with Nadab and Abihu. It is the justice of God that amazes us, not His mercy, because we have come to expect Him to be patient, kind, forbearing, merciful, and full of grace.

God has never acted unjustly toward *anyone of us, even one time*. It is utterly **impossible** for Him to do so. Whenever we have received unjust treatment, it has always been at the hand of man.

Suppose you are falsely accused of stealing a fairly large sum of money. It does not have to be money, it does not have to be stealing, but you are accused of something. You have offended somebody and they feel that you have done this to them and you feel that they are wrong. Maybe you know, absolutely, that they are wrong in their accusation.

If it is a serious enough crime, your accuser can have you arrested, a trial can take place, and maybe you would even be sent to prison. As far as your relationship with men is concerned, you have been a victim of a gross injustice, because you were not guilty, but the evidence seemed to point in that direction. Maybe it was all circumstantial, but you know that you were not guilty. The judge said you were guilty, the jury said you were guilty, and off you go to prison, the victim of an injustice.

If such a thing occurs, you have every right to appeal before God regarding the unjust treatment and plead with Him for vindication. You are being persecuted and God promises vindication in His Word. Someday, it will come. But all of these injustices occur between men.

We have to remember that over all courts, over all kings, governors, presidents, over everything is the Supreme Judge of all of creation. Though men may mistreat you, God never has. And yet, while you and I can rise up and complain to God about our mistreatment, we still cannot complain to Him that He has been unjust in allowing this human injustice to fall on us.

Go with me now to Matthew 18. This is somewhat of a digression, but I thought it good to put this in here so that we can understand the way the Bible illustrates the contrast between the justice of God and the justice (or we might call it the injustice) of men. Just to help us again to see that there is never any injustice with God. Even though He may allow injustice to occur, He has never been unjust in allowing these injustices to occur.

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

From what I understand, the Talmud indicated according to Jewish teachings that you only had to forgive a person three times. And so Peter, when he said seven times, was really being expansive and generous in his thinking!

Matthew 18:22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Just a number to illustrate that there is no end to the mercy that we should be willing to give to others. How could Jesus have a basis for saying anything like that?

Matthew 18:23-25 Therefore the kingdom of heaven [now here comes God into this picture] is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

The overall lesson of this parable is that being merciful has to be a constant attitude. That is why Jesus used the figure seventy times seven. You are not to take that literally. It is an illustration to help us understand that our attitudes of forgiveness, mercy, and grace should be something that we practice constantly. There is no end to it. That is the overall theme of this parable and it is going to be illustrated a little bit more specifically.

It is illustrated through the act of forgiving. Incidentally, the word 'forgive' comes from the English root 'forth give' and that word means "to dismiss absolutely from the mind." Is there any scriptural backing for this?

Remember what God says about Himself in relation to you and me? "Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more." He absolutely dismisses our

sins from His mind. There is the standard; there is the pattern for mankind to follow.

This parable illustrates this trait of God, that is, His forgiving Spirit, His merciful Spirit, His graceful and gracious Spirit. He illustrates that trait by comparing the unjust and calculating bankruptcy of human nature as compared to the generous richness of God's grace.

Let us begin here by looking at the size of the indebtedness to God. If a talent is taken to be of silver, according to the Roman calculation then ten thousand talents would be an amount equal to about \$3,000,000 American. If it is of Jewish calculation, then it would be about \$10,000,000. If the talent happened to be of gold, then it would be about \$150,000,000.

Again, God does not intend you and I to take this figure literally. The figures are given only to present a contrast. Now, in addition to the sheer magnitude of the debt, the man had an additional problem. He had absolutely no collateral, no assets that he could sell, get rid of, cash in, in order to meet the debt. So he was commanded then to go completely and totally into bankruptcy. He was to be sold into slavery, along with his wife and children.

If you are putting yourself into the parable, you ought to be able to see that the indebtedness we have to God is so great that only the compassion and mercy of God's heart can meet our case. We have absolutely nothing by which we can meet the debt, except our life. That is the only thing we can give Him. We have nothing to meet the debt except our life.

Even if we could somehow have enough money, it would still be unacceptable because we find in Isaiah 55:1 that salvation is without money and without price. The debt is payable solely by the work of the sinless Christ. God had already determined that the wages of sin is death. Sin can only be paid for by death.

If God gives us justice, then we have to pay with our life. That is all she wrote. That is the end, because nothing we could come up with would enable us to pay the debt. So, if we pay it that way, that is the end.

Now if by faith we believe, we accept the sacrifice of Christ in our stead, then God will apply as a substitution Christ's sacrifice for our debt. But—there is a big BUT here—in the process, we become even further indebted to Him, because now we owe Him our life. We have been bought and paid for through the death of someone else.

Matthew 18:26-30 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

This part of the parable reveals the utter heartlessness of the forgiven one. Again, put yourself into this and see if the shoe fits. It is utter disregard of his obligation to emulate the example of his lord.

The contrast is shown in that he was owed the paltry sum of what amounted to \$12.00 American. A sum that was all out of proportion to what he owed his lord, but he tried to exact a mere pittance from his companion. *He took him by the throat!* What an illustration. That is pretty hard-hearted. You see, just like the students, how quickly he forgot the grace that had been extended to him; how quickly he forgot the grace that was given him and put him under the obligation to manifest the same kind of grace to others.

Now do you think there is no obligation for us to emulate the grace of God?

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another [now notice this last phrase], just as God in Christ also forgave you [in exactly the same way].

Does it mean, too, in the same measure? We demand so much of our fellow man. They must forgive us, but should we forgive them? Some of us want

everything our way, whenever there is a difference with others. We want them to treat us with loving concern, but we want to be free to run over them, and abuse them, and use them, to be inconsiderate of them, to be unthinking of them.

Christ said the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Let us carry this one step further. Do you realize that our forgiveness by God is directly tied to our forgiveness of other men? It is right in the Sermon on the Mount. It is right in what we call the Lord's Prayer. Look at it in Matthew the 6th chapter, still holding your finger in Matthew 18.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Forgive us our debts, as (in the same manner) we forgive our debtors.

Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

That is pretty clear and specific. It is pretty scary, folks. Pretty scary.

Now let us go back to Matthew 18. God expected the forgiven servant to extend grace in the same manner that grace was extended to him. And so now, we find at the end of the parable something else very interesting.

Matthew 18:31-35 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

So we see then, at the end of the parable, that the lord's grace, that the lord's compassion, the lord's mercy is forfeited because of the greed, the anger, and the lack of compassion in the forgiven one.

If our acceptance of the doctrine of God's forgiveness is merely intellectual acceptance, and it has not produced any change of attitude and conduct that brings us closer into conformity with Christ, we are in trouble with God. We are not learning the lesson. We are to behave toward others the way God behaves toward us. And it takes a while. It takes the remainder of our lifetime to come to that, but we should be moving in that direction.

Let us go back and pick up the theme we had going there before we got to Matthew 18. We are going to look at the way God dealt with the apostle Paul.

II Corinthians 11:23-28 Are they ministers of Christ? [He is talking about the false apostles.]—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Do you think that God treated Paul unjustly? Was **God unfair to allow all this pain** to come into the apostle's life? Now, consider yourself in the picture. Is God unfair when He allows us to go through a difficult, seemingly overbearing trial, to allow us to be insulted, to allow us to be offended? There is never injustice with God. Absolutely none, ever! **It is impossible for Him to be unjust!** Do you know why? We owe Him our life.

In another place, regarding a healing that the apostle had not yet gotten, God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you." Do we consider that in relation

to ourselves? Brethren, God would still be perfectly just to allow me to be thrown into prison for the rest of my life and to throw the key away. I may be innocent before men, but I am still guilty before God because *I have sinned!*

We often blame God for injustices done against us and we harbor some measure of bitterness against Him because we **feel** that He has been unfair. And even if we feel, intellectually, that He has been gracious toward us, we continue to feel that He has not been gracious enough. We feel as though we deserve more grace. Did you hear that? What was wrong with that sentence? Well, there was nothing wrong with that sentence grammatically. What is wrong with it is the word "deserve."

Let us turn to Romans 11 Paul says:

Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

Flip back to chapter 9:

Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

It is impossible for anyone, anywhere, at anytime, to deserve grace. Grace by definition is undeserved. As soon as we begin talking about something deserved we are no longer talking about grace (that is what chapter 11 was just saying), but justice. God is NEVER obligated to be merciful.

President Bush recently gave executive clemency to Casper Weinberger and four others who were allegedly involved in the Iran-Contra Affair. Major portions of the country, at least the political and the media folk, erupted with a howl of protest. They were incensed because they thought that these men were guilty and should be punished to the limit of the law. But what President Bush did was within his powers. He did not do anything illegal or unlawful, because the executive branch (or I should say the President) has that power to extend clemency in such cases.

Now, what we need to know is that God reserves to Himself the **supreme right** of executive clemency. Are you guilty of anything? Does God have the right to extend grace to you the way the President extended grace to Casper Weinberger? Even though maybe Weinberger was guilty, the President was still within the law to do that. God is allowed to do that too, but He is not ever, ever obligated.

Suppose ten people sin equally. And suppose God punishes five of them and He gives mercy to five others. Is this injustice? No, it is impossible for God to be unjust. His judgment, you see, is always perfect. In this case, five got justice and five got mercy, but nobody got injustice.

We tend to assume that if God is merciful to five, then He must be merciful to everybody equally. Now why? He is never obligated to be merciful to anybody. He is not under obligation. God never owes mercy. If He decided to be merciful to nine, but not merciful to the one, the other one has no right to come back to God and complain, because he has not been the victim of injustice. Remember this—God is never obligated to treat everybody equally. That is a thought of men.

And so they come up and devise governments to try to make everything equal. Communism is a supreme example of this. Take from the rich, give to the poor. Let us make everything equal. It is **impossible** because of human nature! They are trying to do something impossible, and so what happens in that kind of a situation is that power flows into those who are in power, and they take that power in order to try to make everything equal, and they exercise that power and make everything unequal. It is an impossibility. God in His wisdom knows that and He never attempts it, to make everything equal. But God is never obligated to treat all men equally.

If He was ever unjust to us, then we would have reason to complain. But simply because He grants mercy to my neighbor gives *me* no claim on His mercy. Remember—God's mercy is always voluntary. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." He is the Supreme Commander, He is the judge of all men, and He chooses whom He will give mercy to.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are only two things that I have ever received from God—mercy and justice. I have never received injustice from His hand. We may ask God to help us when injustice comes into our life at the hand of men, but brethren, you would be utterly foolish (and I mean that, *utterly* foolish) to **ever** ask God for justice from Him. He might just give it and *sayonara*, you are dead. That is all she wrote.

You know how I know that? This verse that I just read to you says that. The wages of sin is death. That is what we owe Him. If He carries that out, that is justice. We have gotten what is fair.

The cry to God is **ALWAYS FOR MERCY**, and I do not mean that in a sick way. That is logical, that is right, that is good for a person to do, because it leads a person to recognition of his indebtedness to God, and will produce thanksgiving to Him, as we come to recognize how indebted we are and how much He has given us in the way of mercy, when everything we deserve is death! There is everything working in human nature to make us think that we deserve more and better! We think more highly of ourselves than we ought in relation to God—that somehow or another He owes us something. He owes us nothing! **WE OWE HIM EVERYTHING**, as we are going to see more and more as we go along here.

I might add here, too, another important factor, and that is that God's mercy, God's grace is **not** limitless. Some like to think of it as being endless, of limitless, but you cannot find any scripture that would teach you or tell you such a concept. There are those people who believe in universal salvation, that God is just going to save everybody, but you cannot find scriptures to support either universal salvation or unlimited grace.

God is infinite and God is gracious, and we experience the grace of an infinite God, but grace is not infinite. God sets limits on His patience and forbearance, and He warns us over and over that someday the axe is going to

fall and His punishment will be meted out. How many prophecies have you read that in?

It is occasions like the sudden and dramatic executions of Nadab and Abihu, and of Ananias and Sapphira, and Uzzah, that He shows us the dreadful power of His justice. It is just as though He is saying to us, "Be careful. While you enjoy the benefits of My grace, don't forget My justice! Don't ever forget the gravity of sin. Always remember," God is saying, "I am holy."

This past week here in Charlotte, we heard a disc jockey interviewing some person on the phone, and it happened to be a religious context. The disc jockey said, in the course of his explanation of some things, that he believed in a very tolerant God. God is not tolerant! He is not tolerant of sin! **SIN KILLED HIS SON!** God is patient. There is a **big** difference between being tolerant and being patient. God is merciful in that He has not wiped us all out. But He is not tolerant of sin at all, and He cannot abide in its presence.

He is a holy God. We need to remember that and take advantage of the time that He has given to us, take advantage of the understanding that He has given to us, and yield to Him so that we can become like Him.

There are two words in each testament that are most frequently translated into the English word grace. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew words are *hen* (just like a female chicken, phonetically) and *hesed*. Though sometimes these words are translated into the word grace, they most frequently appear as the words "mercy" and "favor." The reason is because they are more specifically defined in those senses.

The concept of grace, even though those words are rarely translated into the word grace, is just as strong in the Old Testament as it is in the New, even though the word grace does not appear that often. We are not going to be dealing with the Old. We are going to be dealing with the New, because we are more familiar with it and that is where the concept of grace is most specifically expounded upon by, mostly, the apostle Paul.

The Greek language simply has several words, all from the same root, that more specifically expresses God's attitude and acts toward man. The most common is the word *charis*, which is pronounced *khareece*. It is word #5485

in *Strong's*, and its root in turn is *chairō*, which is word #5463. Now *chairō* means 'cheerful.' It means 'calmly happy.'

What the New Testament writers did, is they took a common and ordinary Greek word and through their usage, they turned it into something having awesome, spiritual meaning. The Greeks used *charis*, #5485 (that is the one that is most frequently used) in the following sense:

First of all, if we were going to define it specifically, it means 'that which causes joy, pleasure, or gratification.' Remember, the root word means 'cheerful and calmly happy.' The word derived from that, which is the one most commonly translated grace, *charis*, means 'that which causes joy, pleasure, or gratification.' It means 'gratifying in manner.'

And so *charis*—grace—is what **causes** delight. Get that emphasis. It is what causes delight. The emphasis is on causes.

Now, in secular Greek, *charis* would be used in this manner: If a warm wind from the south comes through the city in January, and gives a break from the dreary, gray coldness of winter, the wind is grace. You see, it causes joy. It lifts people's spirit. It gives them a sense of relief from the dreariness of winter.

If you are having a meal and you are having a fine wine that is good tasting, has fragrance to it, the wine is *charis*. It is grace, because it is giving you a sense of gratification. It is giving you pleasure. You are enjoying the meal because of it.

If a person is attractive and comely to look on, has an engaging personality, is tactful and artful, the person is said to have charm. Charm is *charis*, grace.

Now the grace is not just in the fact that they are beautiful, tactful or artful, but the delight that we experience because of them—it gives us joy, it gives us a sense of relief, it gives us a sense of well-being—the gift is actually in the other person. You see, the charm, the quality, is in the other person, but we experience a benefit from it. In other words, it comes to us freely,

because the other person has it. We did nothing to earn it. We enjoy it because they have it and they share it with us, simply because we are with them.

So we have not earned the delight, the charm, or the gift, or the grace, because it is in somebody or something else, and we have experienced delight or favor because they are in that person or thing, and our lives have come in contact with it or with them. You see, in this word, there is always the sense of gift. Nothing earned, nothing deserved, always the sense of gift.

What the New Testament writers did is they turned this very common Greek word into a theological one, basically using it as the absolutely free expression of the lovingkindness of God. We receive the benefit because this is the way He is. We have not earned it. We receive the delight, we receive the liberty, the freedom, the forgiveness simply because that is the way He is! So it is unearned, unmerited favor.

That, though, is just its basic usage and it is applied by the apostles in many different situations. Depending on the context, it can be used to mean 'thanks.' Have you ever heard somebody use the expression, "They say grace at meal"? It appears that way in the Bible:

Romans 6:17 But God be thanked [that word *thanked* is *charis*] . . .

What is he saying there? He is saying, "Give God a blessing. Let Him delight in your thanksgiving. Let Him delight in that you acknowledge that He has done this for you." So you give Him delight, you give Him grace. It is something that you freely return to Him.

In I Corinthians 16:3, the context here has to do with the collection that was being taken for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and it says:

I Corinthians 16:3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your [*charis*] gift to Jerusalem.

In the King James, that word gift is translated "liberality." It has the meaning of a thank offering, something freely given. The saints in Jerusalem did not earn it, they really did not deserve it. It was freely given by the Corinthians

in order to help those in the Jerusalem area out. And so it was *charis*, it was a gift.

Now Barclay, in his commentary, defines it this way: "It always has the idea of something completely undeserved. It always has the idea of something that we could never have earned or achieved for ourselves. For example, the fact that God came to earth to live and to die for men is not something which humanity deserves." You see, forgiveness is by grace.

Again quoting Barclay: "It is an act of pure love on the part of God. The word grace emphasizes at one and the same time the helpless poverty of man and the generous kindness of God. It always has the idea of beauty in it."

If you were able to read modern Greek, apart from the Bible, you would find that they would, in almost every case, translate the word "charm."

Its antonym (very briefly, to help us to nail it down a little bit further), its opposite, is (phonetically) *erga*. It translates into the English 'works.' And works always carries the connotation of something deserved because it has been earned. Grace is never earned. *Erga* always earns us something and we deserve it as a result of our *erga*.

It is interesting that the apostle John rarely used the word grace. Here is the apostle of love, but he hardly ever used the word grace. Incidentally, just as an aside, it is used 150 times in the New Testament—101 times by the apostle Paul. All the other writers together only used it 49 times, so most of the usage of the word was by the apostle Paul.

Now I said John rarely used it. He only used it four times. Three times in greetings and farewells: once in II John 3, once in Revelation 1:4 (both of those are greetings); and a farewell in Revelation 22:21. But, the fourth time he used it is really full of meaning.

Let us go to the gospel of John, and we will learn (I think) a great deal from John.

John 1:14-18 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the

Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Grace is used there, I believe, four times, and we need to consider this. What John is saying is that the entire life of Jesus, who was God incarnate, was a manifestation of God's grace. He was full of grace and truth. It is the gift of the revealing of the nature of God by means of a life lived.

Another way of putting it is God's love for mankind was expressed by giving man a living example of how to apply His way of life. No one can fail to see how God, in the flesh, graciously condescended to serve people of even the lowest ranks—the Samaritan woman who had had six husbands; lepers that He healed; children that He picked up in His arms; the washing of the disciples' feet; the feeding of the hungry; healing of the sick; casting out demons; restoring eyesight and hearing.

Are you getting the point here? As Jesus Christ acted, this is the way God always acts—preaching the gospel, living sinlessly, giving His life (even though sinless), and giving it without complaint of unfair treatment, as a means of redeeming those who are under the power of sin and death. He endlessly gave to us, who, if we received justice, deserve death.

In verse 17, Moses, Christ, grace, and law are all mentioned. Most people interrupt that as a means of expressing contrast. There is a contrast here, but it is not what most people seem to think it is, because John is not putting down Moses. He is not putting down or doing away with law. He is not putting down either one of them in favor of the others—Christ and grace. He is saying that the law was given through Moses and it is absolutely necessary for right living, because it is *the* standard of righteousness—right doing, rectitude.

In order to have social order, there has to be laws. Everybody can see that in games. If you do not have rules of the game, you have absolute chaos with

everybody doing his own thing. Well, that is what happens in society. You have got to have rules or everybody does his own thing. The law of God establishes what the rule, what the standards for life are supposed to be. Not just for those He calls, but everybody worldwide is supposed to be following these things.

So the alternative to not having law is chaos that is caused by everybody doing his own thing. Therefore the law is necessary because it manifest the standards man is to strive to live up to. Grace, though, manifests God's attitude toward those who find that they cannot keep the law.

How is God's grace manifested? It is manifested by His calling, His leading to repentance, the forgiveness of sin, justification, healings, guidance, gifts, education, correction, discipline, patience, and ultimately inheriting the Kingdom and eternal life by means of a resurrection.

The contrast here is not so much between Moses and Christ or law and grace, but between the words 'given' and 'came'. That is, God gave the law through a man, Moses, but He was still remote, detached, and separated, as all of the ritual of the sacrifices, the furniture, the tabernacle, and the temple show. God gave the way of life, but He was separated from man.

But God *came*. Do you see the difference? Do you see the contrast? He gave a law, but He was still detached. He *came* in the form of a man, and He was *present* with man, living with man in bodily form. The giving of the law, though it was necessary, was merely a step leading to the far more important revelation of God incarnate. The law was given, but grace came in person.

Now let us go back a few verses and this will become clearer.

John 1:9-12 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now verse 18 becomes clearer.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

The prospect of any man, at any time, ever seeing God in His glory, is virtually non-existent. But for those who were privileged to live back then, they had a flesh and blood witness—God incarnate. And for those of us who live now, we have His Word that is based upon eyewitnesses of His glory, of His grace. This is why Jesus said what He did, in John 14, when He was asked to show us the Father. In John 14:6, Jesus said:

John 14:6-9 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." And Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Grace incarnate arrived before men. The great gift, you see, that gives us delight from which we receive salvation; from which, as we just saw, we receive the calling. No one can go to the Father except through Him.

So God uses this introduction to the book of John to make clear a very important fact and concept. The fact and concept are one and the same, and that is that God is not a being detached and separated from His creation. He is not merely exalted and worshipped, but God is involved. He takes part in the process. He loves, He yearns, He suffers, He gives, He corrects, and He saves. He enters right into the storms and conflicts of life on earth, and in the

life of Jesus, He was subject to all of its conditions and He rose above it. He conquered sin and Satan. It says in Hebrews that "He was tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin."

And so in Christ, then, in a life lived, God ceases to be an abstraction and becomes a reality. The incarnation, then, was the fullest manifestation of grace and truth because it was the greatest expression of God's concern and compassion for people, and the clearest way of conveying for our understanding. No one can ever forget the power of an example.

The context mentions grace and truth together. In practical situations, the truth emerged from Jesus' words and grace in acts of love, so that grace and love virtually become synonymous. Now what does Jesus ask of us in return? He asks for loyalty to God—faithfulness.

He also says here, "grace for grace," or "grace upon grace." It means, "grace to meet every need." It is on this principle that we are now going to begin to expand—grace upon grace.

The apostle Paul sometimes uses grace as kind of shorthand for the entire process of salvation. When he says in Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men," he is talking about grace upon grace. He means **everything that God gives, from beginning to end**—we can go all the way back to the thought of God, to the first thought He ever had regarding reproducing Himself and carrying everything forward.

Are you with me? Do you understand? Everything in the salvation process that enables us to be saved is something that is *given*! God was under no constraint, at any time, anywhere, under any occasion to give us anything! He is **never** obligated!

But He has carried forward His purpose because that is what He is. And it is almost like He cannot help Himself. He loves what He is doing. He loves what He is. He loves us and He wants to expand what He is, in everything that He has created, because it is so **good**.

The ramifications for that are almost awesome. I mean, they are *awesome* to begin to think about that. If we will do the little bit that is required of us, He will give us everything we possibly need in order to be saved! He does not want to see failure anywhere. The hardness of heart will not earn His approbation at all. He is looking for us to yield to His grace, His gifts, what He is, His love. They begin to become synonymous. That is why Paul used it as shorthand. It begins to represent everything that God is and everything that God gives. And it is what we have to become. That is why He tells us that we have to forgive as He forgives. It is another part of becoming like He is.

We are going to stop here, because there is much to say on this, and God-willing, with your prayers and my preparation, we will continue this subject next week.